

Acton Dog Park Committee

Presentation to 348 & 352 Main Street Neighbors



348 & 352 Main Street

Thursday June 25th, 2020

Introductions

- ▶ Acton's Dog Park Committee members:
 - ▶ Tom Gillispie, Chair
 - ▶ Karen Martin, Vice-chair
 - ▶ Fred Kinch
 - ▶ Mike Perry
 - ▶ Clare Siska
- ▶ Under the guidance of:
 - ▶ Joan Gardner, BoS liaison
 - ▶ Matt Selby, Director of Land Use and Economic Development
 - ▶ Tom Tidman, Natural Resources Director
 - ▶ The Acton Recreation & Land Use departments

What is a Dog Park?

A **dog park** is a park for dogs to exercise and play off-leash in a controlled environment under the supervision of their owners. Dog parks have varying features, although they typically offer:

- ▶ a 4' to 6' fence
- ▶ separate double-gated entry and exit points
- ▶ adequate drainage
- ▶ benches for visitors and owners
- ▶ shade for hot days
- ▶ parking close to the site
- ▶ drinking water
- ▶ facilities for disposal of animal waste, regular maintenance, and cleaning of the grounds.

Dog parks vary in size and are found in both urban and suburban settings. They are typically run under a set of rules and guidelines, have town support, and are often managed and maintained by a citizens-run board or “Friends of” group.

Dog Park Examples



Eagle Rock, CA



Houston, TX



Kansas City, MO



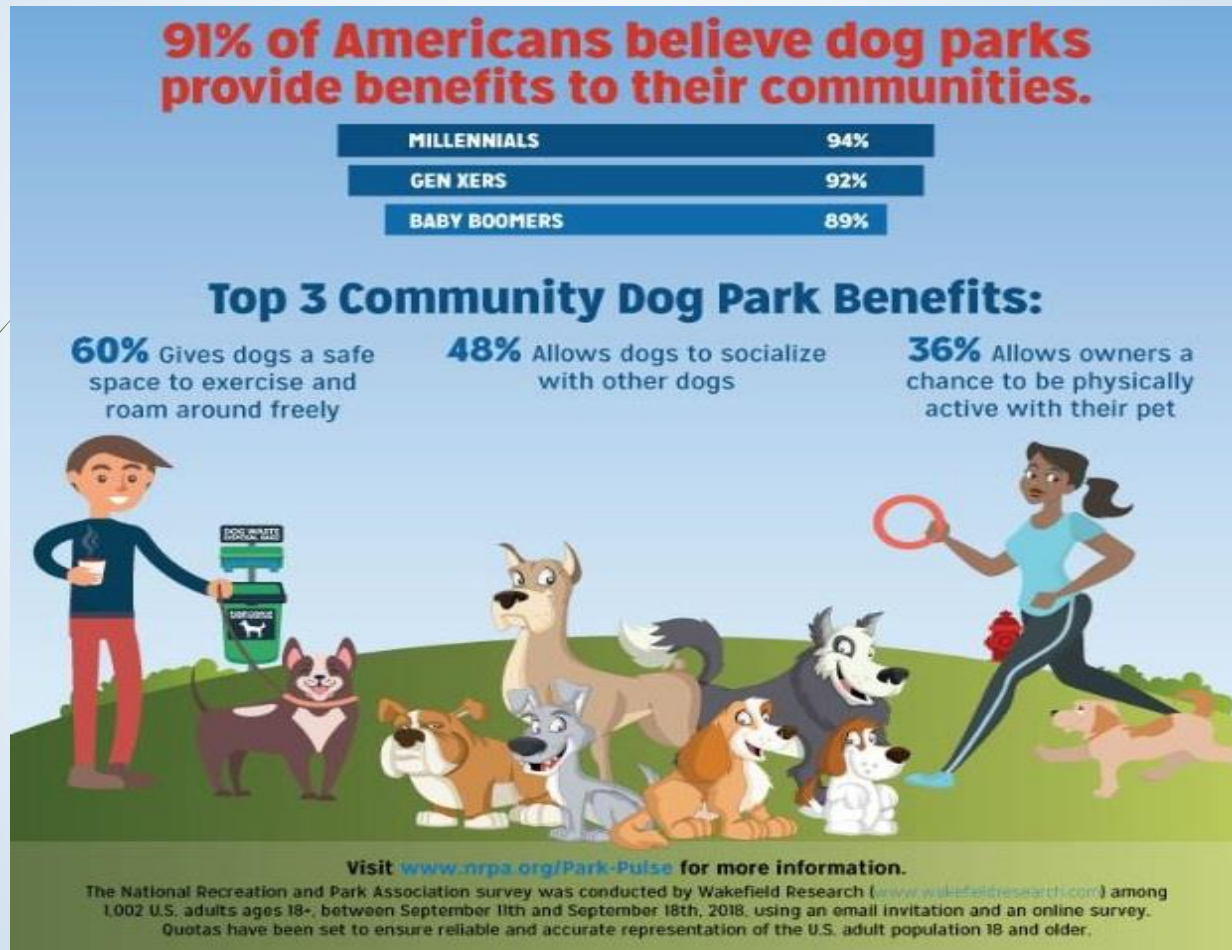
Albany, NY

Community Benefits

There are over 800 dog parks across the U.S., and the number is growing! A dog park is included in Acton's 2014 – 2021 [Open Space and Recreation Plan](#). Why?

- ▶ Opportunities for fresh air and exercise
- ▶ Therapeutic benefits of being around dogs
- ▶ Community building
 - ▶ New dog owners learn from others
 - ▶ Sharing of knowledge and resources
- ▶ Well-socialized dogs have fewer behavioral problems
 - ▶ Reduced dog-on-dog aggression
 - ▶ Reduced incidents of dog aggression towards humans
 - ▶ Fewer dogs surrendered to shelters
- ▶ Dog parks attract new residents and visitors
- ▶ Users spend money in the community

Benefits Backed by Research: National Rec. and Parks Assoc.



Neighboring Dog Parks

There are over 80 dog parks in Massachusetts, including those in these neighboring towns:



Maynard



Ayer



Chelmsford

The Search for a Location

- ▶ 13 municipal properties vetted against research-based criteria
- ▶ Extensive, town-wide outreach
- ▶ Significant research and ongoing adjustments made in response to public feedback, including a Public Forum held in June 2019
- ▶ Of the four most suitable sites:
 - ▶ DPW land near NARA: A Town Manager's report on impact and cost of using that property led us to drop that site from consideration
 - ▶ Great Hill dropped due to wildlife and wetness issues
 - ▶ 70 Quarry Road undesirable due to tree removal impact; currently sought by another Acton group
- ▶ While all locations have drawbacks, the parcels at 348 & 352 Main Street surpass all others – “best fit” and most widespread community benefit

348 & 352 Main Street Parcels



Why the Main Street Site?

- ▶ As the site of the future septic field for the Acton Housing Authority (AHA) housing development, use for other purposes is limited; co-use for a dog park has been approved by Acton's Board of Health.
- ▶ The two parcels are not part of the AHA purchase agreement. The Town retains control over their use but has no funding for their improvement.
- ▶ Suitable size & appropriate terrain. The area where we propose to site the dog park is 1.32 acres in size or about 57,000 square feet -- the same size as a football field. By comparison, Ayer's dog park is about 43,000 square feet; Maynard's park is roughly half an acre or 22,000 square feet.
- ▶ Some consider this cleared, undeveloped land to be an eyesore. The park will beautify the first view of Acton from the Rt. 2 exit.
- ▶ Stanton Foundation grants should cover all design costs and 90% of construction costs up to \$225,000. Stanton grant funds provide an opportunity to make beneficial environmental improvements with little financial impact to the town.
- ▶ AHA housing development residents could enjoy nearby outdoor open space and interact with or observe dogs if they so desire.
- ▶ The central site is easily accessed from multiple locations for both pedestrians and vehicles and is in walking distance to Kelley's Corner.
- ▶ Safety enhanced by proximity to Acton's Public Safety Facility.
- ▶ Town water is readily available.

348 & 352 Main Street Now



348 & 352 Main Street Proposal

- ▶ Create two separate, enclosed areas for small and all dogs on “lower” parcel closest to Rt. 2. Design to include:
 - ▶ ADA-accessible trails
 - ▶ Aesthetically appropriate fencing with double gates
 - ▶ Seating
 - ▶ Shade trees and central gazebo anchoring site
 - ▶ Dog waste stations
 - ▶ Water fountains
- ▶ Complete sidewalk from Rt 2 to the AHA development and work with planners to improve the Rt. 2 intersection.
- ▶ Parking, landscaping, walking paths, and park/gardens on “upper” parcel closest to neighbors and AHA development.
- ▶ Other upper parcel opportunities for pollinator garden, native plants, historical or educational information about Acton, etc.

Acton Housing Authority Concept



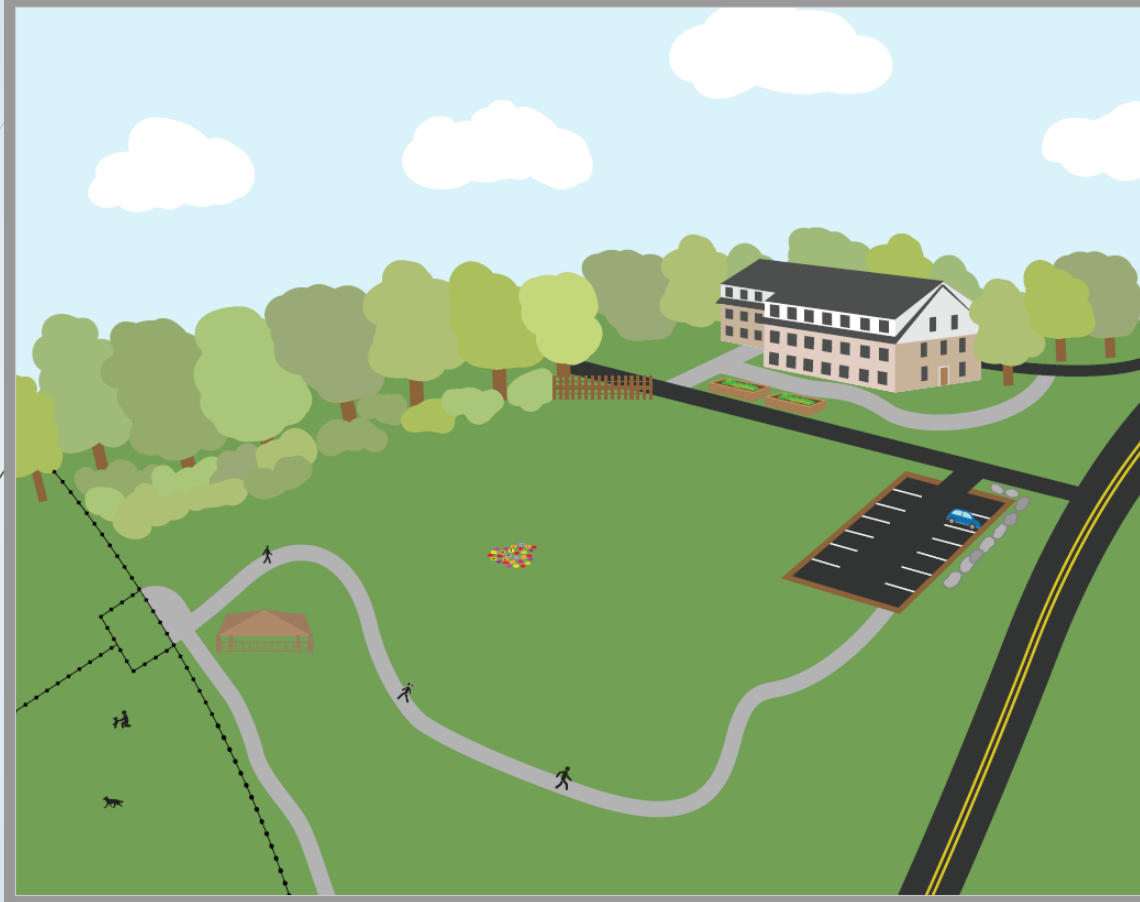
The AHA envisioned green space, a gazebo, and trails on the “upper” parcel in its 2019 proposal, however, the AHA has no control over the use of these parcels nor funds for their improvement.

Land Use Department Concept



Our concept retains most of that green space and a larger gazebo, with the addition of a small parking area.

Integrating the Two Concepts



Moving the gazebo to the sloped area allows it to be shared by all users and creates space for gardens.

Gazebo “anchor”




One potential design for the shared gazebo

Concerns Heard to Date

- Noise and barking will be disturbing.
- The park won't be maintained; it will get run down, be unsanitary and unsightly.
- The park and parking lot will attract crime.
- Traffic and congestion will increase.
- There is no room for parking at this site.
- A dog park will negatively impact property values.
- Users won't follow park rules and regulations.
- The Town will be liable for incidents in the park.

We invite your questions, your input, and your ideas...

- Which of the concerns we listed are of most concern to you?
- Do you have concerns we haven't listed?



... and would like to share what we've worked on so far.

Addressing Noise & Barking

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- The dog park will be situated over 250 feet from the closest dwelling, as far away from residences as the site allows.
- The natural rise in land from the lower to upper parcel will help to contain and abate the sound.
- Tours of local dog parks have shown that dog parks are not excessively noisy, with only intermittent barking.
- Sound tests have indicated no increase in ambient noise level at the closest residence when 75 decibel (dB) dog barking was simulated in lower property. 75 dB is considered “loud barking.”
- Informal discussions with an acoustical engineer have indicated that the sound levels of dogs barking at the property boundaries are well below typical levels (70 dB) allowed by most towns. He has also provided suggestions for sound buffers for further noise abatement.
- ADPC will work with the design firm to include the suggested sound buffers, such as acoustical fencing, trees, and bushes.
- The park will not be used at night.

Addressing Sanitation

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- Rules for the dog park will require users to pick up after their own dogs; they will be displayed by the entrances and throughout the park.
- Experience shows that dog park users are very conscientious in picking up waste; they also tend to police each other through peer pressure.
- Ground cover should be relatively maintenance free but permeable and chosen to make pick up easy. Many options are available, but we will be guided by the design firm.
- Regularly scheduled maintenance by park users / volunteers
- Provide sufficient disposable bags and trash/recycling receptacles. Billerica uses standard residential auto-pick-up 64-gallon receptacles with lids to contain refuse; smell has not been an issue for them.
- Trash & recycling pickup will be added to Acton's park maintenance routes; planned to be done periodically – supported by Recreation Department.
- The park will be designed with proper irrigation to wash away any odors; smell has not been an issue for Burlington.

Addressing Crime & Safety

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- ▶ Acton's Police Chief Burrows has indicated no concerns for safety or increased crime at this location; there is no data to suggest parking lots have attracted crime in Acton.
- ▶ We will work with the town to promote the completion of the sidewalk from Rt 2 to AHA development and to add flashing signals at the existing crosswalk.
- ▶ Burlington's experience was that there was not an increase in crime; they found the park acted as a deterrent when people are present, using the park.
- ▶ Billerica didn't see an abnormal problem; in fact, more people activity in an otherwise unused area resulted in less crime.
- ▶ Overly aggressive dogs will be discouraged from using the park. Owners who use dog parks tend to be well-informed and dedicated owners who understand that socialization and exercise are important for dogs' behavior, health and wellbeing.

Addressing Traffic & Parking

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- ▶ Dog park usage tends to be diffuse rather than in concentrated time frames.
- ▶ Burlington's experience was that there was some additional traffic when the park initially opened, then it leveled out.
- ▶ Billerica has not seen traffic as a problem.
- ▶ Wilmington has not seen a significant traffic problem even though it is a popular park.
- ▶ Given the concerns about traffic in the area, we could suggest that the Town reduce the speed limit to 30 mph in the area from Rt. 2 to Hayward Road.
- ▶ Proposed Massachusetts Department of Transportation project # 610553 will add traffic signals, further improving safety.
- ▶ Parking for 10-12 cars has proven to be sufficient for a park of this size.
- ▶ Billerica has 11 parking places "which seems to be just the right number. Its parking area is rarely empty, rarely overcrowded.

Addressing Design & Maintenance

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- ▶ ADPC will work a design firm/landscape architect that has experience designing dog parks to achieve an aesthetically pleasing park.
- ▶ Billerica's park is similar to other parks in their community; they don't feel it is unsightly. The Billerica Dog Park Committee maintains the park, under a memo of understanding with the town.
- ▶ Burlington's experience has been that users are protective of the park and keep it clean; their town maintenance division maintains the park on a regular basis.
- ▶ Acton recently passed a small increase in the dog licensing fee to provide funds for the dog park maintenance. Anticipated revenue is comparable to what neighboring towns currently spend for park maintenance.
- ▶ A "Friends of the Acton Community Dog Park" group is forming to provide continuing oversight of the park; maintenance will be monitored to keep the park in first-class shape.
- ▶ For Wilmington, the DPW does routine maintenance. Their "Friends of the Dog Park" group polices the park and ensures users follow the park rules. Wilmington's "Carry In, Carry Out" policy for trash at first took some education, but now users "get it."

Addressing Property Values & Liability

- ▶ Burlington's experience was that a dog park is something people enjoy and look for in a community these days.
- ▶ Billerica feels that the dog park is a benefit, as a resource for residents with dogs. More public parks tend to have a positive effect on property values.
- ▶ Well-maintained and responsibly-used dog parks may actually improve the value of some neighborhoods, according to a study by UC Davis.
- ▶ Realtors have found that the presence of a dog park is often considered an asset to prospective home buyers.
- ▶ We will develop rules and regulations for the use of the park which will be clearly posted at entrances and throughout the park.
- ▶ Limits on the number of dogs per user will be considered. UC Davis recommends three dogs per participating adult.
- ▶ ADPC and the "Friends of..." group will maintain an open dialogue between the town, users, and neighbors before, during, and after construction.

What we've learned from neighboring towns about dog Parks

- ▶ Dog parks enhance property values.
- ▶ Having a dog park improves safety by adding a human presence at a formerly vacant property.
- ▶ A dog park deters crime by promoting positive activity.
- ▶ A "Friends of..." group is needed for oversight; this is in process in Acton.
- ▶ The park should feature well-posted rules and regulations governing its use.
- ▶ Funds for ongoing maintenance and upkeep should be put in place.

Current Plans for Next Steps

- ▶ Summer - Fall 2020:
 - ▶ Neighborhood and town committees' input
 - ▶ Formation of “Friends of...” group
 - ▶ Presentation(s) to Acton's Board of Selectmen
 - ▶ Request BoS Approval of the Main Street site
- ▶ Fall - Winter 2020-2021
 - ▶ Grant applications & allocation
 - ▶ Select designer and commence design work
 - ▶ Additional fundraising
 - ▶ Bidding process / select contractor(s)
 - ▶ Building possibly starting Spring 2021

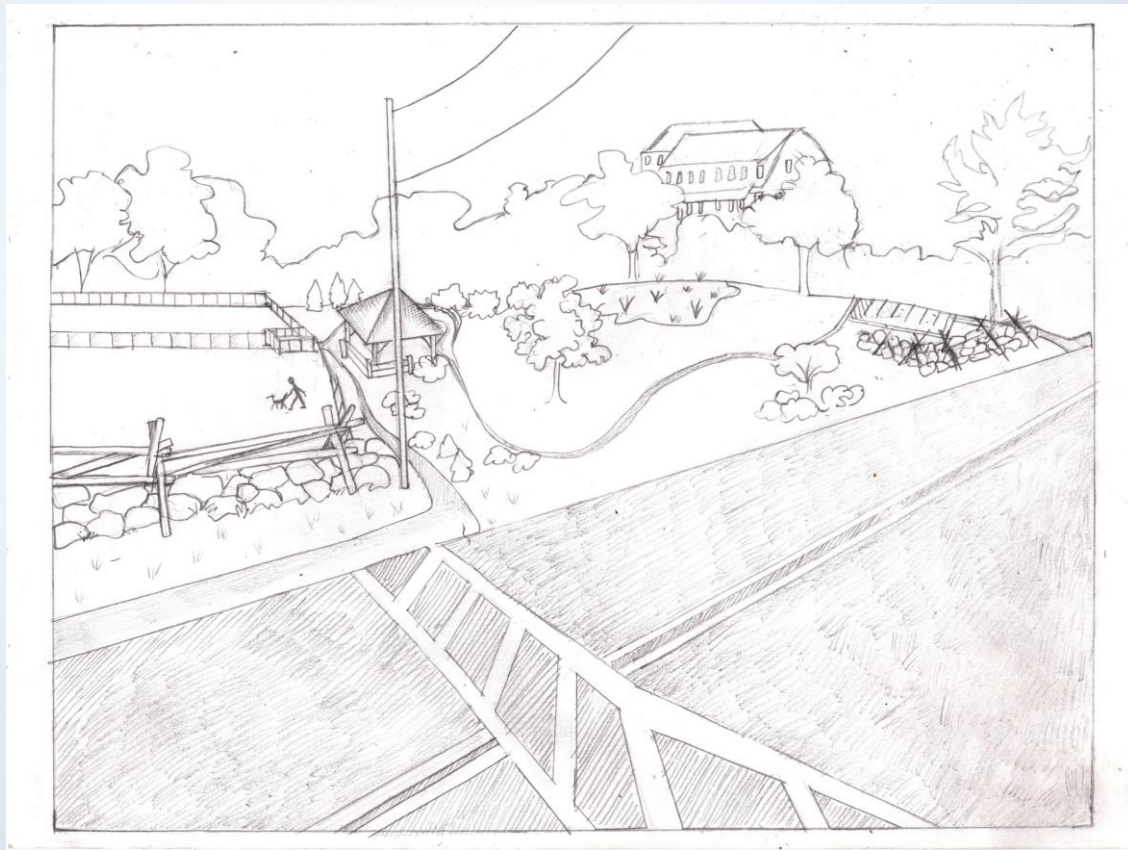
348 & 352 Main Street's Future...

This?



348 & 352 Main Street's Future...

Or this?



Acton's Dogs and Dog Lovers...

Thank you!!!

